

TOYNBEE: THE HISTORIAN AS FALSE PROPHET

A Failure of Conscience

WALTER KAUFMANN

ON THE heels of Toynbee's ten-volume *A Study of History*, there have appeared two volumes of criticism of that work, as well as a new book by Toynbee himself: *An Historian's Approach to Religion*.^{*} The two books of criticism differ decisively in kind from the many critical studies which are now devoted to poets, philosophers, and theologians: they are crushing exposés.

In the first of the two, *Toynbee and History*,[†] a volume of collected essays, we find the staid London *Times Literary Supplement* arguing that Toynbee "frequently" relies on "radical distortion of the facts," and that his central thesis is downright absurd and "reinforced by a vast hodge-podge of subsidiary theories, arguments and explanations which are by no means always mutually compatible." Geoffrey Barraclough, who has since succeeded to Toynbee's chair of international history at Chatham House in London, attacks Toynbee's "inconsistency and his arbitrary use of historical evidence,"

TOYNBEE's ideas have before this been subjected to critical scrutiny in COMMENTARY, notably in two articles by Franz Borkenau that appeared in our May 1955 and March 1956 numbers. Here WALTER KAUFMANN concentrates on Toynbee's approach to religion, and particularly his attitude toward Judaism. Mr. Kaufmann, associate professor of philosophy at Princeton, was born in Germany in 1921 and in 1939 came to this country, where he attended Williams College and Harvard. He is author of *Nietzsche* (1950), *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (1956), and a recently completed work tentatively titled *Critique of Religion and Philosophy*; articles by him have appeared in a number of literary and learned periodicals, including *Kenyon Review*, *Partisan Review*, and *Journal of the History of Ideas*.

and explicitly agrees with other scholars that Toynbee's vaunted empirical method is "mere make-believe." Barraclough also ridicules Toynbee's "hotch-potch of the platitudes of current social and political analysis, combined with wishful thinking and dubious speculations." And Hugh Trevor-Roper, the Oxford historian, concludes: "Helping out his conjuring tricks with imperfect light, distracting noises and a certain amount of intellectual hanky-panky, he pretends that he has proved what he has merely stated. This seems to me, in so learned a man, a terrible perversion of history."

Some of the Americans represented in the book take a kindlier view, and most of them hedge their strictures with tributes to Toynbee's erudition, but none of them answers these crucial charges; or, as I believe, my own critique of Toynbee as historian, scientist, poet, and theologian, which is reprinted in the same volume.[§]

Toynbee's fantastic treatment of the Jews, to which I had given a mere three pages, is the subject of the second book, Maurice Samuel's *The Professor and the Fossil*.^{**} One might wonder whether there was much point in a single author's devoting a whole book to Toynbee—and, at that, a book concerned mainly with a single theme. But once you start reading Samuel there is no stopping, and once you have finished there are no regrets. Compellingly written and rich in its humanity, Mr. Samuel's work

^{*}Oxford University Press, 318 pp., \$5.00.

[†]Edited by M. F. Ashley Montagu, and published by Porter Sargent, Boston. Reviewed in COMMENTARY, September 1956.

[§]It is reprinted—unfortunately with a great many misprints—from *Partisan Review*, Fall 1955.

^{**}Knopf, 268 pp., \$4.00.

is no mere critique, but a positive contribution to the understanding of Judaism and the Jews from Biblical times to our own. What is criticized, moreover, is so monstrous that it is good to have such an able exposure to set the record straight.

Toynbee's failure is in part a failure of conscience. There are many who quite fail to see this, objecting that some selection is imperative, that some mistakes are unavoidable, and that scope, originality, and human interest offer ample compensation. This is one of those half-truths with which the road to hell is paved. It is conscience alone that can raise sweep and novelty in thought above mere fantasy and daydream.

Samuel shows how Toynbee based his notoriously untruthful version of the Israeli war of independence on "the account prepared by Mr. George Kirk for the *Survey of International Affairs* and published . . . under the editorship of Professor Toynbee" himself, and that Toynbee used only what, taken out of context, seemed to give some substance to his theses, while he left out all the crucial points that gave them the lie. Any talk of Toynbee's erudition is irrelevant at this point. Nobody questions that. What he lacks is a scholar's conscience. When Samuel attacks Toynbee's "sanctimonious pretense at historical (and, indeed, cosmic) objectivity," and claims that what Toynbee has done is "mendacious" and "intellectually contemptible," he may seem emotional and disrespectful. But will it seem unjust to anyone who has read both Toynbee and his critic?

SHARP polemics are not popular in the United States today: witness the difference between Toynbee's critics in America and those in England (and the contrast, too, between political campaigning in the two countries: our campaigns resemble a game much more than a fight). In the United States mere corrections of errors are usually shrugged off as unimportant and questions of method are considered academic. While an avowal of agnosticism would ruin a politician's career, glaring misstatements of fact,

false promises, and mendacious accusations are expected and excused. Clearly, truthfulness is considered much less important in America today than theism, success, and some semblance of charity. Toynbee possesses these three essential attributes of the politician and, like the politician, is forgiven for his lack of truthfulness.

Like the German philosopher Heidegger, Toynbee is so opposed to positivism that he no longer cares about correctness. Thus, the sixth volume of his *Study of History*, first published in 1939, contains a "Table of Universal States" in which it is maintained that Western civilization has had two different branches, and that the Western branch experienced universal peace, or as he prefers to put it, "*Pax Oecumenica* A.D. 1797-1814." But as Toynbee himself surely knows, there was scarcely a single year of peace between 1797 and 1814. The Eastern branch of Western civilization, the area of "the Danubian Hapsburg Monarchy," had its "*Pax Oecumenica* A.D. 1526-1918." I admit there is a certain boldness in the figure 1918. A more timid man might have said 1914, hoping that the reader would forget the Thirty Years War, the Seven Years War, the Napoleonic wars, and other more or less remote wars. Pieter Geyl called Toynbee's attention to these glaring errors—and a host of others—but the "Table" is reprinted without change in Volume VII, which came out in 1954.

By some strange logic, there are many people who suppose that a man who is so wrong about the past is more likely than others to be right about the future. On the jacket of Toynbee's new book Professor Allan Nevins is quoted as saying what we have indeed been told again and again: "He is more than a historian: he is a great deal of a prophet." In occasional articles no less than in his books, Toynbee himself has cultivated the impression that he can foretell the future, but he usually avoids interesting or tangible predictions—his chapter in the present book, on "The Religious Outlook in a Twentieth Century World," is a case in point—and in the early volumes of the *Study*

of *History* we not only fail to find forecasts that have been fulfilled in the meantime, but we find that the author has been much less perceptive than a great many of his contemporaries. Decidedly, his was not a voice warning the world against Hitler, for example, or against the evils that have come to pass since World War II.

But perhaps Toynbee harks back to the Hebrew prophets, who were less concerned with forecasting the future than they were with the morals of their people? To be sure, Toynbee is a moralist of sorts, but he could hardly be more remote from the distinctive ethos of the prophets, who were more self-effacing than any other men of comparable stature have ever been. They disappeared completely in their messages and sacrificed their lives to them. No historian, on the other hand, has ever attached a tenth of the importance Toynbee does to the minutiae of his own life.

You need only scan the index of Volume X of the *Study*, with its two columns of amazing references to Toynbee, Arnold Joseph: "... critical faculty, awakening of" down to "walking, liking for." But there is no need to labor this point, since Toynbee himself clearly does not find the pre-Exilic prophets congenial: not one of the indices of his ten-volume *Study* lists a single reference to even one of them—which does not keep Toynbee from posing as an authority on Judaism or from giving the appearance that he is thoroughly at home in the Bible (from which he quotes the same passages over and over).

SURELY, Toynbee is not more than a historian. He is less than a historian, he is a symptom—a symptom of the worship of size; a symptom of the eclipse of scruple; a symptom of the contemporary hunger for vast spectacles, and for men of learning who champion at least some kind—almost any kind—of religion. Above all, Toynbee's success is a symptom of the widespread need for some assurance that history has a meaning.

Troubled by the futility of so much hu-

man suffering, by deeply ambivalent feelings about the mechanization of modern life, and by profound confusion in the face of more and more specialized experts, people long desperately for a royal road to meaning. They want to be told in a few simple words what the meaning of it all is. Thinkers who would be impeccable in their methods generally avoid this question, but there are millions who will not be put off, and these people turn to commentators, columnists, or editorials, and to popularized accounts of what has been done in specialized fields. They also turn to Toynbee. As long as there is at least some small promise of significance, people will readily put up with vagueness, inconsistencies, and errors.

If one factor more than any other accounts for Toynbee's popularity in the United States, it is surely his concern with religion—not simply the fact of his concern but, above all, the nature of it. His frequent references to God and Jesus, and the thousands of footnote references to the New Testament that record his every use of a Biblical turn of speech, assure the Christian reader that the Bible is still right. At the same time, Toynbee's growing hope for a vast syncretism in religion pleases those who feel that the one thing needful is a meeting of East and West. He makes a great show of religion, which the Hebrew prophets did not, but presses home no unequivocal or incisive demands, which the prophets did. Unlike most, if not all, of mankind's great religious figures, Toynbee makes religion *in-gratiating*—as do our politicians and our most successful magazines. He offers us history, social science, anecdotes, schemes, entertainment—all this and heaven too.

An Historian's Approach to Religion sums up in less than three hundred pages what is scattered over the more than 6,000 pages of the *Study of History*. Constant references to those sections of the latter work in which "the subject of this chapter has been dealt with in greater detail" make it clear that these Gifford Lectures on religion, which he delivered at the University of Edinburgh in 1952 and 1953, are meant to represent

the ultimate conclusions to which his vast *Study* has led him.

The author's interest is confined to six religions. Of these he says at the outset: "In the world of A.D. 1956 the greatest cultural gulf was not the rift between Judaic Western Liberalism and a Judaic Western Communism; it was the chasm between the whole Judaic group of ideologies and religions—Communism, Liberalism, Christianity, Islam, and their parent Judaism itself—on the one hand and the Buddhaic group of philosophies and religions—post-Buddhaic Hinduism, the Mahayana, and the Hinayana—on the other hand." There is nothing in the book to persuade the reader who is not content to accept this diagnosis without any argument. If anyone should wonder about the "cultural gulf" between the Western world on one side and the Arab world, or the colored peoples of Africa, or the Chinese, on the other, he will find that Toynbee has nothing to say in this connection.

Now one might expect some intensive treatment of the six religions which interest Toynbee. He might at least try to deepen our understanding of them, one by one, or three by three. Nothing of the sort is offered. It is of the essence of Toynbee's method, or rather of his lack of method, that he does not take up the six religions in turn—no more than he does the twenty-odd civilizations enumerated in his *Study*—and that he does *not* base his generalizations on induction. His whole style of thinking is inseparable from his habit of moving freely and allusively among his topics, letting words like "proved" and "must" and "therefore" do the work of demonstration. Many of his statements are not only metaphorical but qualified beyond the point of any clear meaning, and a great deal of what he says in one place he contradicts in another—to produce what Maurice Samuel politely calls "the blurring effect."

Part One, which makes up about half of Toynbee's new book, is entitled "The Dawn of the Higher Religions." He discusses this dawn without a single mention of Moses, the Upanishads, or the Bhagavad-Gita, and

consequently he throws little light on the dawn of Judaism, Hinduism, or any other religion. He informs posterity: "What Man's original religion may have been is a question that was still under debate in A.D. 1956." The third sentence after this begins: "It is, indeed, conceivable that Man did not begin to worship Nature until he had begun to be able to manipulate her. . . ." And the following sentence reads in full: "The worship of Nature will have had its *floruit* in the long age during which Man felt himself to be neither wholly impotent in the face of Nature (so that it was now no longer quite useless for him to try to influence her) nor wholly master of her (so that to try to influence her was still worth his while)." Surely, this is not only conceivable, it is a truism; and we may note that the long age described by Toynbee has not ended yet, nor ever will as long as men survive. But a very large part of the book is filled with inferences of this sort, which are made to sound bold by some such phrase as "It is, indeed, conceivable"—but at the same time these phrases qualify what is said in such a way that, pressed, one simply could not say what Toynbee is trying to tell us.

THE first five chapters of the book actually antedate the "dawn," and so it may be unfair to expect light and clarity from them. From "The Worship of Nature" we progress to three kinds of "Man-worship": "The Idolization of Parochial Communities," "The Idolization of an Oecumenical Community," and "The Idolization of a Self-sufficient Philosopher." Then the darkness lifts for "The Epiphany of the Higher Religions." Evidently Toynbee thinks, and would have us believe, that this was the actual sequence of events in history; but to enable us to judge if this is true or not, he ought to have demonstrated, albeit briefly, how each of his six higher religions was preceded by nature worship and then the three successive stages of "Man-worship." He attempts nothing of the kind, nor does he even try to fix an approximate date for the "dawn" of each higher religion.

"The epiphany of the higher religions" is deduced, not demonstrated; and the deduction is characteristically unconvincing. "Human power, in all its forms, is limited and, in the last resort, illusory." Toynbee says absolutely nothing that might persuade those who do not already do so to accept the last point. "The idolatrous worship of an oecumenical state leads to a policy of keeping Suffering within bounds by force, and so to the paradox of inflicting Suffering for the sake of limiting it." What "oecumenical state" has ever shown any profound concern with the limiting of suffering? The Roman Empire? It is not discussed. Nor does Toynbee show what is paradoxical about, say, inoculating people against diseases in order to limit suffering.

This alleged paradox, however, is crucial for Toynbee's argument, which proceeds: "Since an oecumenical state is the most estimable kind of state that Man has succeeded in creating so far, the moral paradox inherent in an oecumenical state is a verdict on states of all kinds: in its worse and its better varieties alike, the state is the nemesis of Original Sin." Is it? And what does this mean? Has it been established by argument? Or is all this double-talk?

Original Sin, which is again in fashion today, is mentioned frequently in this book, but only toward the end are we told that it is merely "another name for self-centeredness." This definition is well suited to persuade us that Toynbee is an authority on this evil; but it certainly makes nonsense of the sentence that refers to the oecumenical state's attempt to limit suffering.

TOYNBEE's main point is that "the failure of both the idolization of the self-sufficient philosopher and the idolization of the oecumenical community to meet the challenge presented by the failure of parochial-community-worship opens the way for a rejection of the worship of human power in all forms." Hence the birth of the higher religions. But instead of going on to deal with the actual origins of the higher religions, Toynbee drowns us in a flood of

capital letters and rhetoric, concluding: "The infliction of such extreme suffering on the grand scale is a self-indictment of the society in which these atrocities are committed, and in the Westernizing World of the twentieth century of the Christian Era there was a subconscious self-defensive conspiracy to minimize the painfulness of deracination by the euphemism of calling the sufferers 'displaced persons.' In the Hellenic World of the fifth century B.C., Herodotus did not flinch from calling them *déracinés* outright. This has been the human seed from which the higher religions have sprung." Buddha would not seem to fit into this picture—but Toynbee explains that he became "a voluntary *déraciné*" by leaving his father's palace.

What exactly is Toynbee trying to say? Less than a page before, he has claimed that the great philosophers were "born into the middle, or even the upper, class of Society" while, "by contrast, the founders of the higher religions have mostly arisen in the ranks of the vast majority" who are *déracinés*. Now there are, according to Toynbee, only four, five, or six higher religions: Confucius is listed as a philosopher, Lao-tze is read out of history, and whether or not Judaism is a higher religion is left unclear, while Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism are sometimes counted as one religion and sometimes as two. Is it indeed true that the founders of these four, five, or six higher religions "have mostly arisen" among the uprooted? One or two were founded by the Buddha, who "was the son of a parochial prince," and post-Buddhaic Hinduism (a very doubtful conception in any case) did not have any founder. Thus the founders of at most three out of six, or two out of five, of the higher religions were *déracinés*; Toynbee does not say which of these qualify for his word "mostly." Was Jesus *déraciné*?

If Toynbee stooped to list "the founders" of the higher religions before he generalized about them, he would save space and insure precision but, alas, destroy his thesis. He excels even professional politicians in the gentle art of saying nothing, with flamboyant rhetoric, and of stating patent false-

hoods in a manner that prevents ready detection.

Is there really any difference along the social lines suggested by Toynbee between the great philosophers and the founders of the great religions? Or is the difference rather in their following? The word *religion*, unlike the word *philosophy*, is usually reserved for mass movements. And a mass movement, whether religious or not, depends on the adherence of the masses, including notably the lower classes. Now one may go on to ask what predisposes the masses for a mass movement, and it may well be that "displaced persons" are especially predisposed. Toynbee does not furnish much evidence one way or the other, but Eric Hoffer, in his *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements* (Harper), has listed a great many similar factors to which "displacedness" might well be added, though hardly as either a necessary or a sufficient condition. It might also be argued, and was in fact argued at length by Nietzsche, that there are two kinds of morality and religion: the kind that develops among lower classes and the kind, like Hinduism and Buddhism, that originates among ruling classes.

Toynbee's famed erudition manifests itself not in a disciplined awareness of important studies of his subject matter by other writers—let alone rival hypotheses or facts which do not seem to fit his own account—but in a flair for quaint allusions. His method is what Stephen Potter calls "One-Upmanship." Where a red herring might be recognized and challenged, the queer fish that Toynbee introduces with an air of mildly bored authority silence all opposition—unless you either happen to know about them or have the patience to find out.

In his chapter on "The Epiphany of the Higher Religions" we encounter two typical examples of this technique. The reader who does not know Toynbee might well suppose that the following sentence came from Stephen Potter himself: "This alloy of Archaism in Futurism partly accounts for the failures of Aristonicus in a Roman Asia and of his contemporaries the insurgent

Syrian slave-kings Eunus, Cleon, and Athenio in a Roman Sicily." And a little later on the same page we read: "In Jewish history the classic gentle archaist is Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai." The reader is likely to conclude that Toynbee, even if he does not quote the pre-Exilic prophets, is at home in Talmud and Rabbinic literature. But Rabbi Johanan seems to be the only rabbi known to Toynbee. He never once refers to Hillel's teachings or Akiba's, for example; and all he knows of Rabbi Johanan is one story, which he quotes from Burkitt's book, *Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (1914). Maurice Samuel shows that Toynbee's interpretation of the story is untenable, but charitably fails to mention that Toynbee uses it no less than nineteen times.

It is not clear what Rabbi Johanan has to do with the "epiphany" of his religion, which presumably occurred more than a thousand years before his own time. It is clear, however, that Toynbee believes that "Johanan ben Zakkai's inspiration has enabled Judaism to survive in diaspora." (The last word, which is Greek for "dispersion," shows that the "subconscious self-defensive conspiracy" which Toynbee finds behind the phrase "displaced persons" is not confined to "the twentieth century of the Christian Era," as he claims. Plainly, it goes back to the Greeks, notwithstanding the unflinching Herodotus, who, as we have seen, preferred the French term, *déracinés*. And Toynbee himself does not mind joining this conspiracy when mere fossils are concerned.)

TOYNBEE finds self-centeredness the greatest vice of man, calls it our Original Sin, and believes that the historian can help men become less self-centered. With this last point I could not agree more. Surely, a study of history may shatter our parochial prejudices by acquainting us with people and ideas quite remote from our own environment. We need not accept completely the modest but faintly ironic alternative which the great 19th-century historian, Ranke, posed in the preface to his first great work: "To history has been assigned the

office of judging the past, of instructing the present for the benefit of future ages. To such high offices this work does not aspire: it wants only to show how things actually happened." By doing just that, and no more, the historian can perform a crucial moral function and quite change our valuations.

Toynbee, however, displays a singular inability to transcend his own idiosyncrasies. The one idea which, as he sees it, he shares with the Eastern ("non-Judaic") religions is their tolerance and openness to syncretism; but this he did not learn from the Eastern religions. His tediously repetitive praise of Mahayana altruism is another instance of his willingness to praise in other religions only what he himself has believed all along. In short, Toynbee's tolerance consists in giving credit to others where they happen to agree with him. Of any serious effort to do justice to other views one finds no trace in him.

Toynbee writes as if he had accomplished some sort of Copernican revolution by discovering that world history does not revolve around one's own country; but he is much more parochial than was Ranke when he wrote that "every epoch is immediate to God." And if, as Ranke said, "the true historian . . . must feel a participation and pleasure in the particular for itself . . . [and] a real affection for this human race in all its manifold variety" while keeping clear of "preconceived ideas,"* then Toynbee is a poor historian indeed.

It may seem unfair to judge him by Ranke's standards, but these strictures really amount to an *internal* critique of Toynbee's ideas. I am appealing to standards which he professes too. Speaking, at the start of his book, of the chasm that allegedly divides the Judaic from the non-Judaic religions and ideologies, Toynbee says expressly: "In the bridging of this chasm the contemporary historian has a part to play which is as difficult as it is important. The self-correction through self-transcendence, which is the es-

sence of his profession, no doubt always falls short of its objective; yet, even so, it is something to the good; for to some extent it does succeed in . . . widening the mental horizon of an innately self-centered living creature." And a great many more words to the same effect.

By the end of that same first chapter, we find Toynbee stubbornly resisting "self-correction through self-transcendence" when he attacks the critics of his own attempt to discover historical laws as men who have given "a superficial answer." And he offers arguments against the "historians of this antinomian Late Modern Western school" which are not only preposterous but reveal an utter failure to understand, let alone do justice to, his critics. It is this initial failure of understanding rather than the fine statement about "self-correction" that sets the tone for the rest of the book.

SURELY, Toynbee would advance the cause of tolerance and self-transcendence ever so much more if he tried to give his readers an understanding of the ethos of the Hinayana and of the Hindus, of the Diaspora and of Zionism, of the early Christians and of Islam, of neo-Orthodox and Liberal Protestantism. Instead of doing all, or some small part, of this, he sits in judgment without ever questioning his own standards. He cannot refrain from airing once again his humbug about the Jews and Judaism, and he puts the Buddha in his place again and again by finding him "illogical" and "inconsistent." (Would that Toynbee himself were half so logical, consistent, and compassionate as the Buddha—and that he tried to substantiate his charge by something more than sheer repetition!) He charges Hinayana Buddhism with superficiality; he informs us that Mohammed fell into a fatal error; and he would persuade us by tireless reiteration that Mahayana Buddhism and Christianity are superior to the other high religions, not to speak of low ones. This is surely a strange triumph over one's innate self-centeredness!

Speaking of the higher religions generally, Toynbee declares that "a church's mis-

*See *The Varieties of History*, edited by Fritz Stern (Meridian Books).

sion is to preach the gospel to every creature"; and later he tells us, still in *An Historian's Approach to Religion*: "The true purpose of a higher religion is to radiate the spiritual counsels and truths that are its essence into as many souls as it can reach, in order that each of these souls may be enabled thereby to fulfil the true end of Man. Man's true end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever." It is, among other things, according to the extent to which religions meet these stipulations that Toynbee passes judgment. Hence his approach is partisan from the outset, and that of a theologian rather than a historian. But to qualify as good theology, Toynbee's opinions would require some rational explication as well as some arguments. A good historian, on the other hand, even though he might be reluctant to go into the history of his own standards and opinions, would try to bring to life the ethos of non-missionary religions like early Hinduism and early Judaism. In doing that, he would perform a major service to theologians, philosophers, and mankind at large.

Toynbee maintains a naive, popular, pragmatic standpoint and insists on a "practical test. 'By their fruits ye shall know them.'" He fails to see that the next question, even if we go along with him, is bound to be: And by what standards shall we judge the fruits? In unhesitatingly applying his own standards, he is guilty of the very parochialism which he set out to slay.

Sometimes he considers success as such an indication of superior value. No criterion could be more popular today, but few things are more unforgivable in a historian, and an avowedly religious historian at that, than the appeal to success. It is surely one of the major functions of a historian to expose the frequently unedifying causes of success with neither fear nor favor. Toynbee, on the contrary, sides with the friends of Job, inferring prior virtue from success, and guilt from suffering.

His partisanship for Christianity also leads him frequently to falsify the facts. Here is a pretty stark example: "The Christians

were the only people in the Roman Empire, except the professional soldiers, who were prepared to lay down their lives for the sake of an ideal." Rather more subtle, and still more popular, are the distortions in Toynbee's account of the development of Christianity out of Judaism. Here he compounds widely accepted errors with fantastic innuendo.

This Christian vision of God is a heritage from Israel. . . . Before Yahweh became the parochial god of a community of Nomads . . . he would appear to have been a god embodying one of the forces of Nature. Perhaps he was a volcano or perhaps the weather, to judge by the traditional account, in the Pentateuch. . . . A god who had . . . led his "Chosen People" in an aggressive war of expropriation and extermination against the inhabitants of a country that had been neither Israel's to take nor Yahweh's to give, might not seem to have been a promising medium for an approach to Reality. Yet the sufferings inflicted on Israel and Judah by Assyrian and Babylonian hands during a time of troubles that dragged on from the eighth into the sixth century B.C., inspired the Prophets to see, through the wraith of Yahweh the parochial war-god, another Yahweh who had more in common with the god in the Sun who was worshipped by Ikhnaton, Aristonicus, and Aurelian.

This Atonian Yahweh was Justice and Mercy as well as Power, and his Power and Justice were . . . omnipotent, ubiquitous, impartial. . . . But the vision had still to be clarified by the further insight that the God Almighty who was Justice and Mercy was also Pity and Love; and though the greatest of the Prophets beheld Pity and Love incarnate in a Suffering Servant, it was a stumbling-block to the Jews when Christianity identified this human figure with the sublime God who had made His epiphany through Yahweh's forbidding lineaments.

Again, is this a historian's approach? Has any other historian of any repute claimed that Yahweh "was a volcano or perhaps the weather"? Does Toynbee's interpretation of the Pentateuch inspire confidence in his interpretation of other, less widely known documents? Have the five Books of Moses no moral significance whatsoever? Was Moses himself, who is altogether ignored here, nothing but "the leader of the Exodus" (as the index to Volume X identifies him)? And

does not the last sentence of Toynbee's first paragraph give the strange impression that between the 8th and 6th century B.C.E. the Jews at last came close to catching up with the superior wisdom of such men as Ariston-icus and Aurelian, who, as a matter of fact, lived many centuries later and distinguished themselves as leaders in aggressive wars?

And what sense does it make to say that the prophets stressed justice and mercy, but not pity and love? Is there some sharp distinction between mercy and pity? And is Toynbee seriously suggesting that the prophets failed to speak of love, as they did again and again? If anything can equal this succession of distortions, it is the final sentence, which somehow gives the impression that the Jews could not accept the attribution of pity and love to "the sublime God." Not even Toynbee would care to deny, I think, that what they balked at was the identification of a "human figure," whatever his qualities might be, with God. Nor do the Gospels picture Jesus as the incarnation of "Pity and Love." Indeed, the Jesus of the Gospels is not half as compassionate as Hillel or the Buddha. And is the God of hell and judgment, the God of Jesus and Augustine, of Dante and Calvin, less "forbidding" than the God of Jonah?

EVEN when it is freed from all insinuations, Toynbee's central thesis here remains highly questionable. In a footnote in the *Study* (V, 119) it is stated, unadorned: "Christianity stands, not side by side with Judaism, but on its shoulders, while they both tower above the primitive religion of Israel. . . . Before and below the Prophets, the Biblical tradition presents us with a Moses. . . ." The great popularity of this idea does not make it sound. I shall mention only a few reasons for rejecting it.

First, Toynbee accepts uncritically one of the pseudo-Darwinistic dogmas of the 19th century when he assumes without argument that religion is like science, and unlike art, in exemplifying progress. I have no doubt that in some ways it does. But if Judaism is at all like other religions, there is not only

no overwhelming presumption that Moses must surely have been far inferior to the prophets, but, on the contrary, the analogy with other religions makes it probable that a towering figure, perhaps never equalled since, came at the outset. Moreover, the prophets themselves testify consistently that the morality which they proclaim is not original with them. They all say more or less what Micah says: "You have been told, O man, what is good and what the Lord requires of you."

Secondly, Toynbee's notion that one religion stands on the shoulders of another and represents, as he says at times, the culmination of its predecessor, is profoundly questionable in principle, quite apart from the case at hand. I cannot hope to resolve this problem here, but the reader might well ponder that even in the 19th century, when this idea gained popularity, both the greatest historian and the greatest Christian thinker of the age repudiated it. Kierkegaard insisted that the superiority of Christianity could not be demonstrated in this manner and that Christianity represented one alternative among others, necessitating a decision. And Ranke said that "every epoch is immediate to God."

Thirdly, Toynbee is compelled to distort facts to create even a presumption in his favor. I have in mind not only his overt distortions in the long passage cited, but also his systematic failure to acknowledge the radical discontinuity between the prophets and Jesus. The prophets were not concerned with individual salvation, they did not assume a life after death, let alone eternal damnation, and they did not address themselves to the question, "How can I enter the kingdom of heaven?" Their central theme was the will of God and social love and justice. They stressed the rights of the widow and the orphan and the stranger, and denounced injustice on the international level too: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares . . . nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

Toynbee gives us no inkling of all this,

or of the vast differences between the prophets and Aurelian, Aristonicus, and Ikhnaton, and he ignores Jesus' decisive break with this prophetic heritage. Surely, there is a very important sense in which Jesus' Gospel is self-centered and the message of the prophets is not.

ANOTHER distortion, again not confined to Toynbee, is also connected with the rise of Christianity. He argues, chiefly in Chapter Nine of the new book and in Volume VII of the *Study*, that "the translation of the gospels of Christianity and Islam into terms of Hellenic metaphysics has had awkward consequences because it ignored the distinction between two facets of Truth which cannot be focused into unity by . . . the Human Mind." These two facets are poetic truth and scientific truth.

What Toynbee recommends is this: "Strip the Christian and Islamic gospels of their incongruous and outworn Greek scientific dress; resist the temptation to put them into an alternative scientific dress of a Western cut which will also be incongruous and ephemeral; and take the truth that they express in the non-scientific poetical sense that is the natural sense in this context." This may be appealing, but Toynbee's way of putting the issue depends on a misrepresentation of the facts. He asks: "In what sense did Christians, in those very early days before the statement of Christian beliefs began to be Hellenized, mean that Jesus was the Son of God, that He rose from the dead, that He ascended into Heaven?" In other words, what was Christianity like before it became Hellenized? Everything hinges on the "before." For to what *time* exactly is Toynbee referring by "those very early days"?

He knows, of course, that the Fourth Gospel is not pre-Hellenistic. Nor can he possibly suppose that Paul's Epistles *are*, and these are commonly acknowledged to be older than the Gospels. Moreover, Toynbee himself has shown in over 150 pages, in an "Annex" to Volume VI of his *Study*—which "Annex" is much more interesting than his new book but has been generally ignored—

that the story of Jesus is inseparable from Hellenistic folklore and beliefs: detail after detail in Jesus' story, and in some of his most poignant sayings, too, is shown to have been a commonplace of pre-Christian Hellenistic literature.

Reviewers have remarked on how Toynbee passed from the religion of his fathers in the first six volumes of the *Study of History* to religious syncretism in the last four, but not one review that I have seen has called attention to this "Annex" (in those days he still spelled it without the final "e"), which seems to me to account for the change. (This does not preclude that his divorce may also have influenced his estrangement from Anglo-Catholicism.)

Toynbee lost the faith of his fathers and his belief in the uniqueness of Jesus when he discovered that Christianity itself was syncretistic. But if Christianity was the result of syncretism, how could it now shut itself off against a further, worldwide syncretism?

Toynbee fails to grasp two crucial consequences from which, on his own showing, he cannot escape. He cannot continue to cling to the popular idea that its Hellenic dress and everything that appears theological in it was added to Christianity at a relatively late date. This is a prejudice of many Protestants who recall that Luther had no patience with Aquinas or Aristotle and tried to go back to original Christianity. But Luther's original Christianity was profoundly Hellenic, as is evidenced, briefly, by his repeated estimate that "the evangelist John is a master above all the other evangelists" and "that he alone might well deserve to be called an evangelist." Toynbee has to face the question whether it was not Hellenism rather than any higher morality that led to Christianity's break with Judaism. For according to the Book of Acts in the New Testament, it was the Christians who broke with Judaism, and did so long after the time of the crucifixion. Toynbee rejects and ridicules theology, but he should ask whether the crucial beliefs which distinguished the Christians in those days, and ever since, or

at least until about one hundred years ago, were un-theological.

Toynbee's attempt to demythologize religion assumes, moreover, without argument, that the Christian beliefs—of which he himself has shown that many are encountered widely in pre-Christian literature in connection with different pagan heroes—have a hard core. He assumes further that there is some univocal core not only of Christianity, but of religion in general, which can be variously translated. This assumption is gratuitous and, I think, false.

Even if Micah's famous words, "only to do justice and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God," were the essence of Judaism and all the rest were a mere mistranslation of this essence, this is certainly not the essence of Christianity: else, as Paul told the Galatians, "Christ has died in vain." Surely, Paul's theology is not a misguided attempt to translate the Hebrew prophets' concern with social justice into his own vernacular. Surely, the attempt to fight social injustice is not only not a part of Buddhism—Hinayana, Mahayana, or Zen—but incompatible with the ethos of Buddhism. Where, then, is the core of "Mankind's Religious Heritage"?

Toynbee's attempt to disengage "the Essence from the Non-essentials in Mankind's Religious Heritage" is another instance of how he takes up a popular idea without in the least illuminating it. He glosses over the differences between the world's religions and gives the impression that these differences are merely quantitative, allowing us to arrange the great religions in a hierarchical scale, with the Mahayana and Christianity at the top. The price these religions have to pay for this singular honor, however, is that they cease to be themselves: indeed, Toynbee flays them alive, as Rabbi Akiba was flayed by the Romans (although we have seen that, according to Toynbee, the Christians had a monopoly in the Roman Empire on dying "for the sake of an ideal"). Toynbee would skin the great religions as one peels an onion (his own metaphor). Only that one

notion in each which meets with Toynbee's favor may remain. The rest is mistranslation.

The "Christian-Mahayanian vision" has, Toynbee thinks, "brought to light something else in God's nature and action which, in the vision of the other three religions [I am not sure which three qualify for second honors at this point], is perhaps latent but is not explicit. Both Christianity and the Mahayana hold that a super-human being has demonstrated His love for human beings in action, and this at the cost of the suffering that is inseparable from being a self."

The religions that receive only a B from Professor Toynbee might well argue that Christianity and the Mahayana are here guilty of a mistranslation and express a worthwhile point in faulty language, inasmuch as they take poetry for history. Actually, there is a huge difference in this respect between Christianity and Buddhism which Toynbee glosses over because it does not fit into his argument.

Is Toynbee justified in rebuking the Jews again and again for rejecting the teachings of the early Christians, who, if he is right, were guilty of mistaking poetry for fact? Why does he find such harsh words for the Jews throughout their history, while he is so lenient with the Crusades and the Inquisition and the Christian emphasis on dogma, faith, and sacraments? Why, in his redundant homilies on suffering, is he so unwilling to show some compassion for the religion whose members have suffered by far the most for their religion? He seems often to side with those who deny charity only to those who need it, show it only where it will attract attention, and above all like to *talk* of it.

IT WOULD, of course, be wrong to claim that there is nothing good in Toynbee's work or in his latest book. R. H. S. Crossman said in a review in the *London New Statesman*, evidently not entirely aware of the full implications of his judgment: "Far the most valuable part of this book is the series of lengthy Annexes" with their copious quota-

tions from John Locke and Thomas Sprat. The quotations from Bayle might be added to the list. It may be, as Crossman seems to think, that by bringing such passages to the attention of his large audience Toynbee has struck a blow for tolerance, enlightenment, and—against traditional Christianity. Similarly, Toynbee's repeated references to Mahayana Buddhism, though not at all enlightening to the scholar—on the contrary—may make a large public aware of a religion whose very name they had not heard before. Toynbee's discussion of essentials and non-essentials, although exasperating to philosophers and theologians and almost anyone else who has reflected on these subjects, may make a few hundred thousand people conscious of a problem. And so forth.

It would be easy to add further points of the same kind, but this is to my mind faint praise indeed. We should not hesitate to say as much for our most popular magazines. Indeed, that is what people say who would defend comic-book editions of the classics: having read *Hamlet* in this fashion, many who would not have dreamt of reading it in the original will probably go on to read it. Will they? And will Toynbee's readers go on to think seriously about the problems mentioned and eventually forget his errors? Surely, this is wishful thinking.

If these comparisons seem invidious, the reader would do well to ask if Toynbee's work is not insidious. It is entertaining and seems instructive, but it really is not instructive because it is utterly unreliable. It is ingratiating and seems religious, but genuine religion is never ingratiating. It is moralistic and preaches tolerance and ridicules parochialism, but it is full of parochial prejudices, deeply intolerant, and betrays a shocking lack of scruple.

Many people suspect all criticism of Toyn-

bee. Why? First, because some feel, as Toynbee does, that success is a proof of virtue. They overlook the fact that Toynbee's huge success is confined to this country, where public opinion is heavily influenced by magazines with staff-written reviews and huge pictorial displays. (In England, as I pointed out in the beginning, the situation is very different.) Second, Toynbee seems to be religious without being a fanatic, and there is a widespread feeling that this makes a man immune to criticism. Third, and most important, there are few who have read his major work. Those who have read only the one-volume abridgement, which established his success in the United States, assume that everything is proved in the ten volumes. Many critics who have checked some sections only in the large work and found Toynbee open to a vast number of criticisms think the other parts are surely better and wind up their criticisms with a tribute to his scope and erudition. In his new book, Toynbee gives the impression throughout that the theses he advances have all been proved in his big *Study*. Those equipped to criticize his history think that in view of his success he must be a superior theologian or, as we have seen, a prophet.

I have argued here and elsewhere against Toynbee as a theologian and as a historian, as a scientist and as a poet. But if anyone seriously thinks that Toynbee is a prophet, let him consider whether he may not be one of the false prophets, of whom there is never a dearth. He offers us more than we have any right to ask and yet demands nothing from us and, alas, too little from himself. It is unlikely that many Jews, Moslems, or Buddhists will accept him. And Christian readers would do well to think about these words of Jesus: "Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing."